A

DISSERTATION

ON THE

POOR LAWS.

[Price 1 *s.* 6 *d.*]

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BY A

WELL-WISHER TO MANKIND.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR C. DILLY, IN THE POULTRY.

M.DCC.LXXXVI.

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A DISSERTATION ON THE POOR LAWS.

SECT. I.

TO a man of common ſenſibility nothing can be more diſtreſſing, than to hear the complaints of wretchedneſs, which he hath no power to redreſs, and to be daily converſant with miſery, which he can neither fly from, nor relieve. This at preſent is the ſituation of the clergy, who, in virtue of their office, are obliged to viſit the habitations of the poor. Here they ſee helpleſs infancy and decrepit age, the widow and the orphan, ſome requir-

ing food, and others phyſic; all in ſuch numbers, that no private fortune can ſupply their wants. Such ſcenes are more diſtreſſing, when, as it ſometimes happens, the ſuffering objects have been diſtinguiſhed for induſtry, honeſty, and ſobriety. The laws indeed have made proviſion for their relief, and the contributions are more than liberal which are collected for their ſupport; but then, the laws being inadequate to the purpoſes for which they were deſigned, and the money collected being univerſally miſapplied, the proviſion, which was originally made for induſtry in diſtreſs, does little more than give encouragement to idleneſs and vice. The laws themſelves appear beautiful on paper, and will be the admiration of ſucceeding ages, when, in the revolution of empires, the whole fabric of our government ſhall be diſſolved, and our nation, as a ſeparate kingdom, ſhall exiſt no more. Theſe laws, ſo beautiful in theory, promote the evils they mean to remedy, and aggravate the diſtreſs they were intended to relieve. Till the reign of Q. Elizabeth they were unknown

known in England; and to the preſent moment, they have never been adopted by any other kingdom upon earth. It has been moſt unfortunate for us, that two of the greateſt bleſſings have been productive of the greateſt evils. The Revolution gave birth to that enormous load of debt, under which this nation groans; and to the Reformation we are indebted for the laws which multiply the poor.

At the diſſolution of the monaſteries, the lazy and the indigent, who were deprived of their accuſtomed food, became clamorous, and, having long ſince forgot to work, were not only ready to join in every ſcheme for the diſturbance of the ſtate, but, as vagrants, by their numbers, by their impoſtures, and by their thefts, they rendered themſelves a public and moſt intolerable nuiſance. To ſtop their mouths, and to make them employ their hands in honeſt labour, was the intention of that day. But at the ſame time the laws took under their protection ſome objects of diſtreſs, who for near two hundred years, from a noble kind of pride,

refuſed the proffered aid, or received it with reluctance; and who at the preſent moment would be more effectually relieved, if no other laws exiſted but the firſt great laws of human nature, filial affection, and the general benevolence of mankind. The world, it muſt be confeſſed, is wicked enough: yet amidſt all their wickedneſs men ſeldom want compaſſion, unleſs the circumſtances in which they find themſelves are peculiarly diſtreſſing. Should we "in the ſtraitneſs of a ſiege behold men eating the fleſh of their ſons and of their daughters; ſhould we ſee among them a man tender and delicate, whoſe eye ſhould be evil towards his brother and towards the wife of his boſom, and towards the remnant of his children, ſo that he ſhould not give to any of them of the fleſh of his children whom he ſhould eat *;" we muſt not from ſuch inſtances conclude that all men, or even moſt men, are deſtitute of mercy and compaſſion, or that man in general can be kind and beneficent only by com-

* Deut. xxviii. 53.

pulſion.

pulſion. No doubt in every diſtrict will be found ſome, who are ſtrangers to the finer feelings of the human heart; but at the ſame time in every diſtrict will be found ſome, who are endued with generoſity of ſoul; and others, who under the influence of piety will rejoice to relieve the wants and diſtreſſes of their fellow creatures. In every place ſome will be diſtinguiſhed for benevolence, others for brutality; but in general man is what his ſituation makes him. Is he happy himſelf in the enjoyment of eaſe and affluence? In ſuch circumſtances "he will be eyes to the blind and feet to the lame; he will be a father to the poor; the bleſſing of thoſe that are ready to periſh will come upon this man: he will cauſe the widow's heart to leap for joy *." Let the ſame man be ſtraitened in his circumſtances, let him be burthened with taxes, let him be haraſſed by the clamours and diſtracted by the inceſſant demands of the moſt improvident and lazy of the ſurrounding poor;

* Job, xxix.

and he will have little inclination to ſeek for objects of diſtreſs, or to viſit the ſequeſtered cottage of the ſilent ſufferer. It is generally found, that modeſt worth ſtands at a diſtance, or draws nigh with faltering tongue and broken accents to tell an artleſs tale; whilſt the moſt worthleſs are the moſt unreaſonable in their expectations, and the moſt importunate in their ſolicitation for relief. If the latter, from any imperfection of our laws, get abundantly too much, the former muſt of neceſſity obtain too little. If, agreeable to the general practice of the labouring poor, a man, previous to his marriage, or whilſt his family is ſmall, has made no proviſion for his future wants; if all, to whom he might naturally look for aid, are in the ſame circumſtances with himſelf; and if the charity of thoſe among his neighbours, who are diſtinguiſhed for benevolence, nay of all who have the common feelings of humanity, is exhauſted; if they who are moſt willing are leaſt able to relieve him; we muſt expect to ſee diſtreſs and poverty even among thoſe who

who are worthy of compaſſion.—This at preſent is the caſe in England. There never was greater diſtreſs among the poor: there never was more money collected for their relief. But what is moſt perplexing is, that poverty and wretchedneſs have increaſed in exact proportion to the efforts which have been made for the comfortable ſubſiſtence of the poor; and that wherever moſt is expended for their ſupport, there objects of diſtreſs are moſt abundant; whilſt in thoſe countries or provincial diſtricts where the leaſt proviſion has been made for their ſupply, we hear the feweſt groans. Among the former we ſee drunkenneſs and idleneſs cloathed in rags; among the latter we hear the chearful ſongs of induſtry and virtue.

If laws alone could make a nation happy, ours would be the happieſt nation upon earth: idleneſs and vice could not exiſt; poverty would be unknown; we ſhould be like a proſperous hive of bees; all would have enough and none too much. The reverſe of this we find to be the caſe: poverty and vice prevail, and

the moſt vicious have acceſs to the common ſtock. If a man has ſquandered the inheritance of his fathers; if by his improvidence, by his prodigality, by his drunkenneſs and vices, he has diſſipated all his ſubſtance; if by his debaucheries he has ruined his conſtitution, and reduced himſelf to ſuch a deplorable condition that he hath neither inclination nor ability to work; yet muſt he be maintained by the ſweat and labour of the ſober and of the induſtrious farmer, and eat the bread which ſhould be given only to virtue in diſtreſs.—If in all caſes, this bread, ſo ill beſtowed, were ſuperabundant; if the induſtrious farmer were himſelf in eaſe and affluence; the grievance would yet be tolerable.—But in this day it often happens that the induſtrious farmer is oppreſt with poverty. He riſes early, and it is late before he can retire to his reſt; he works hard and fares hard; yet with all his labour and his care he can ſcarce provide ſubſiſtence for his numerous family. He would feed them better, but the prodigal muſt *firſt* be fed. He would purchaſe

chaſe warmer cloathing for them, but the children of the proſtitute muſt *firſt* be cloathed. The little which remains after the profligate have been cloathed and fed, is all that he can give to thoſe, who in nature have the firſt claims upon a father. If this evil could be ſtemmed, whilſt the preſent laws ſubſiſt, he might yet have hope: but when he conſiders, that all the efforts, which have been made in his own pariſh or in others, have been vain, and that the evil is conſtantly increaſing, he is driven to deſpair of help, and fears that he ſhall be himſelf reduced to work for daily hire. It will be evident that his fears are not altogether groundleſs, if we conſider, that even in pariſhes, where no manufactures have been eſtabliſhed, the poor rates have been doubling, ſome every fourteen years, and others nearly every ſeven years; whilſt in ſome diſtricts, where the manufactures are carried on to a conſiderable extent, the poor rates are more than ten ſhillings in the pound upon the improved rents. That the diſtreſs does not ariſe from the high price of corn, will be clear,

if we conſider, what may perhaps hereafter be more fully ſtated, that although for theſe two hundred years the price of wheat has fluctuated between wide extremes, yet upon comparing the average prices within that period, the ancients did not find a cheaper market than the moderns. If we take the average of the ſixty years which terminated at the commencement of the preſent century, we ſhall find the price of wheat to have been ſix ſhillings and four pence halfpenny per buſhel, whereas in the ſubſequent ſixty years it was only five ſhillings; and for the laſt twenty years, ending with the year 1782, not more than ſix ſhillings and ſix pence: yet during that long period in which proviſions were the cheapeſt, the poor rates were continually advancing. That the diſtreſs does not ariſe from the high price of ſoap, leather, candles, ſalt, and other ſmall articles needful in a family, will appear not only from the ſuperior advance in the price of labour (in the proportion of ſix to four within a century),

tury) *, but from hence, that where the price of labour is the higheſt and proviſions are the cheapeſt, there the poor rates have been moſt exorbitant. In Scotland they have no legal proviſion for the poor, yet labour is cheaper and corn is dearer than they are in England.

SECT. II.

UNDER the beſt adminiſtration, the laws relating to the poor give occaſion to much injuſtice; under the worſt, they are too often the inſtruments of oppreſſion and revenge. If the intentions of the magiſtrate are good, his compaſſion may be ill directed; but if at any time his judgment is blinded by his paſſions, in the keenneſs of his reſentment for ſome real or imaginary affront, he is apt to forget the purpoſe for which the adminiſtration of the poor laws was committed to his care, and to abuſe his power, by granting, when the property of his own tenants is

* Sir William Petty, P. Arithmetic.

not to be affected by it, the moſt ample relief to the moſt unworthy objects. This indeed would ſeldom happen, if none but gentlemen of a liberal education were put into the commiſſion of the peace; or if, agreeable to the original conſtitution of our government, this office were elective. But ſhould the wiſeſt and the beſt of men be choſen, yet we could not expect that ſuch would every where be found willing to devote their time and whole attention to the adminiſtration of thoſe laws, whoſe natural tendency is to increaſe the number of the poor, and greatly to extend the bounds of human miſery.

SECT. III.

ALL who are converſant with Tacitus have admired the extent of his knowledge, the ſhrewdneſs of his remarks, and the nervous ſtrength of his expreſſion. In a ſpeech which he puts into the mouth of the Roman emperor Tiberius, we find this paſſage: "Langueſcet induſtria,

duſtria, intendetur ſocordia, ſi nullus ex ſe metus aut ſpes, & ſecuri omnes aliena ſubſidia expectabunt, ſibi ignavi, nobis graves *." Hope and fear are the ſprings of induſtry. It is the part of a good politician to ſtrengthen theſe: but our laws weaken the one and deſtroy the other. For what encouragement have the poor to be induſtrious and frugal, when they know for certain, that ſhould they increaſe their ſtore it will be devoured by the drones †? or what cauſe have they to fear, when they are aſſured, that if by their indolence and extravagance, by their drunkenneſs and vices, they ſhould be reduced to want, they ſhall be abundantly ſupplied, not only with food and raiment, but with their accuſtomed luxuries, at the expence of others. The poor know little of the motives which ſtimulate the higher ranks to action—pride, honour, and ambition. In general it is only hunger which can ſpur and goad them on to labour; yet our laws have ſaid, they ſhall never hunger. The laws, it muſt be confeſſed,

* L. ii. p. 73, 74. edit. Elſ. † Heſiod, 302.

have likewiſe ſaid that they ſhall be compelled to work. But then legal conſtraint is attended with too much trouble, violence, and noiſe; creates ill will, and never can be productive of good and acceptable ſervice: whereas hunger is not only a peaceable, ſilent, unremitted preſſure, but, as the moſt natural motive to induſtry and labour, it calls forth the moſt powerful exertions; and, when ſatisfied by the free bounty of another, lays a laſting and ſure foundation for good will and gratitude. The ſlave muſt be compelled to work; but the freeman ſhould be left to his own judgment and diſcretion; ſhould be protected in the full enjoyment of his own, be it much or little; and puniſhed when he invades his neighbour's property. By recurring to thoſe baſe motives which influence the ſlave, and truſting only to compulſion, all the benefits of free ſervice, both to the ſervant and to the maſter, muſt be loſt.

It is univerſally found, that where bread can be obtained without care or labour, it leads through idleneſs and vice

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to poverty. Before they diſcovered the gold and ſilver mines of Peru and Mexico, the Spaniards were diſtinguiſhed among the nations of Europe for their induſtry and arts, for their manufactures and their commerce. But what are they now? a lazy, poor, and miſerable people. They have been ruined by their imaginary wealth. The declenſion of the Spaniards has been attributed to the expulſion of the Moriſcoes; and the blow was certainly ſevere, but not altogether adequate to the effect. The number expelled was more than ſix hundred thouſand, beſides thoſe who died by the ſword, by famine, or by the ſentences of the Inquiſition. The principal charge brought againſt them was their obſtinate adherence to the Mahometan religion: the political reaſon aſſigned for their expulſion was, that by their induſtry, temperance, and frugality, they were able to work cheaper than the Spaniards, whilſt by their ſobriety they contributed little to the public revenue: but the real cauſe of this impolitic meaſure was an order from the Pope, that theſe infidels

ſhould

ſhould be converted at the expence of the Spaniſh clergy. The Archbiſhop of Valentia was to pay three thouſand ſix hundred ducats yearly, and the other biſhops in proportion to their incomes, for the ſupport of an Arabic miſſion *. Thus the temperate, the frugal, and the induſtrious, being baniſhed from the kingdom, whilſt the indolent found a conſtant influx of gold and ſilver from abroad, the whole nation ſunk by degrees into the preſent ſtate of torpid inactivity. It is more than one hundred and ſeventy years ſince this event, and yet in all that time Spain has not recovered her population. The quantity of gold and ſilver imported annually into Cadiz and Liſbon has been reckoned ſix millions ſterling †. Here we find a ſufficient cauſe for the decay of their induſtry and arts.

Our poor began only to appear in numbers after the diſſolution of the monaſteries. Then it was they firſt attracted notice; but they had exiſted long before, always moſt abundant in the vicinity of

* Geddes, Account of the Moriſcoes.

† Smith, Wealth of Nations.

the

the religious houſes. At the preſent moment we are told, that in Naples ſix thouſand Lazaroni are daily fed by the monaſtic orders, under the ſpecious name of charity, not upon a ſudden emergency, but ſtatedly, and as the only means of their ſubſiſtence. As a peace offering this may be politic and wiſe, well calculated to conciliate the good opinion of the unthinking mind, and to command the admiration of the vulgar; but at the ſame time it is inconſiſtent with the moſt eſtabliſhed principles of political œconomy: for as induſtry and frugality are the only foundation of national proſperity; ſo temperance and labour are the only ſource of happineſs and wealth to individuals. A learned Jeſuit, who has lately written and is now publiſhing an elegant defence of that ſociety, aſſumes great merit from this circumſtance, that inſtead of extorting for themſelves a ſcanty pittance from the vitals of the people, ſuch was the benevolence of theſe holy fathers, and ſuch the abundant wealth of their eſtabliſhments, that they relieved all

in the ſurrounding villages, who made application to their charity. Their intentions, no doubt, were good, but their bounty muſt have been miſapplied. He, who ſtatedly employs the poor in uſeful labour, is their only friend; he, who only feeds them, is their greateſt enemy. Their hopes and fears ſhould centre in themſelves: they ſhould have no hope but from their own ſobriety, diligence, fidelity, and from the well-earnt friendſhip of their employers; and then their only fear would be the fear of forfeiting by their miſconduct, that favour and protection which would be their principal reſource in times of ſickneſs and diſtreſs.

SECT. IV.

A WISE legiſlator will endeavour to confirm the natural bonds of ſociety, and give vigour to the firſt principles on which political union muſt depend. He will preſerve the diſtinctions which exiſt in nature independent of his authority, and the various relations which, antecedent to his

his creation, connected man to man. He will ſtudy the natural obligations which ariſe from theſe relations, that he may ſtrengthen theſe connections by the ſanction of his laws. Among the firſt of theſe relations ſtands the relation of a ſervant to his maſter; and the firſt duty required from a ſervant is prompt, chearful, and hearty obedience. On this condition alone can the connection be preſerved, as without due ſubordination all government muſt end. But our laws tend to weaken theſe bonds, and to deſtroy this ſubordination, by compelling the occupier of land to find employment for the poor. With this proviſion, what have they to fear when diſcharged from ſervice? If one will not employ them, another muſt. If the work be ſlighted or neglected, if it be deſerted in the preſſing hour, or ſpoiled in the execution, it is to little purpoſe for the maſter to complain; he can have no redreſs. Does he ſeek relief from the civil power? The unequal conteſt is begun, and the remedy will be worſe than the diſeaſe. Both the ſervant and the maſter know

when the work is ill performed, or when the ſervant has not earnt his wages, even when legal proof is wanting. If then the maſter has no other remedy, he is at the mercy of his ſervants; he muſt connive at their neglects, and bear their impertinence with patience. There is no alternative but this, or to maintain them without work. The appeal in this caſe to a magiſtrate is from a ſuperior tribunal to the inferior, from the ſtronger to the weaker. Where the natural ſanctions are ſufficient to ſecure obedience without diſturbing the peace and good order of ſociety; there a wiſe legiſlator will be careful not to interfere, leſt, by weakening theſe, without being able to ſubſtitute better in their place, he ſhould ſtop the courſe of juſtice and protect the guilty. The wiſeſt legiſlator will never be able to deviſe a more equitable, a more effectual, or in any reſpect a more ſuitable puniſhment, than hunger is for a diſobedient ſervant. Hunger will tame the fierceſt animals, it will teach decency and civility, obedience and ſubjection, to the moſt

moſt brutiſh, the moſt obſtinate, and the moſt perverſe. A good ſervant need not be afraid of wanting work. If one maſter ſhould diſmiſs him from his ſervice, others will be happy to receive him. But ſhould a man be notorious for a thief, and for ſpoiling or neglecting work; ſhould he be either ſo falſe, ſo vicious, or ſo ill-tempered, that no maſter would be willing to employ him; it would certainly be juſt that he ſhould ſuffer hunger till he had learnt to reform his conduct. There are perhaps few pariſhes which cannot produce ſome of this untoward diſpoſition. Indeed it is the general complaint of farmers, that their men do not work ſo well as they uſed to do, when it was reproachful to be relieved by the pariſh.

SECT. V.

IT may ſeem ſtrange in a country where agriculture, arts, manufactures, and commerce, are moſt flouriſhing, all of which have a mutual and correſponding influ-

ence on each other, to ſay that the laws diſcourage manufactures; yet this may be ſaid of the poor laws in England. By our preſent ſyſtem we prevent their introduction, check their progreſs, and haſten their departure. If the rental of a pariſh were not bound to provide for the increaſing poor, every gentleman of landed property would be ſolicitous to have manufacturers eſtabliſhed on his eſtates, in order to conſume the produce of his lands. By multiplying the conſumers he would enhance the value of all the various products of the ſoil: he would enjoy the monopoly of hay and paſture, and ſhare with all his neighbours to a given diſtance in the ſale of corn. But when he conſiders that manufactures fluctuate, that the benefit which he is to derive from them will not bear proportion to the burthen which he muſt entail upon his property; he will rather wiſh to keep them at a convenient diſtance. The principal benefit he can expect is, that the value of his paſtures ſhould be doubled: but even whilſt the manufacture proſ-

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pers, the demands of the poor, both upon his arable and paſture, will be more than doubled, and when it fails, the poor's rate will ſwallow up the whole. The ſurrounding pariſhes will reap the chief advantage: he will have the happineſs to ſee them flouriſh; but the load and burthen of the poor will remain upon his own eſtate. "Sic vos non vobis fertis aratra, boves *."

In every pariſh, as the law now ſtands, they who have legal ſettlements, have the monopoly of labour, becauſe the labouring poor are confined to their reſpective pariſhes. This proviſion is perfectly conſiſtent with the whole ſyſtem of our poor laws, and was deſigned not only to prevent the evils which naturally ariſe from vagrancy, and which might be equally prevented by more wholeſome laws; but to protect each pariſh from intruders, who might become chargeable either for themſelves or for their children. This proviſion is productive of conſiderable

* Virgil's Complaint.

evils, which the legiſlature has never yet been able to remove: for not only have the induſtrious poor been reſtrained from ſeeking employment where they would otherwiſe have been received with joy, and confined to their own pariſhes, in which they were regarded with an evil eye; but for want of competition the price of labour to the manufacturer has been much enhanced. With a certificate, indeed, the poor are permitted to reſide in any pariſh where work is to be had, but then a certificate is not eaſily obtained. Now it is evident that by raiſing the price of labour you muſt directly check the progreſs of the manufactures; and by experience it is found, that the ſame effect ariſes indirectly to a more conſiderable extent; for in proportion as you advance the wages of the poor, you diminiſh the quantity of their work. All manufacturers complain of this, and univerſally agree, that the poor are ſeldom diligent, except when labour is cheap, and corn is dear. It muſt be confeſſed that too many of them have ſome little reſemblance to

the animal deſcribed by travellers under the name of Nimble Peter; a creature ſo inactive, that, when he has cleared one tree, he will be reduced to ſkin and bones before he climbs another, and ſo ſlow in all his motions, that even ſtripes will not make him mend his pace *. Drunkenneſs is the common vice of poverty; not perhaps of poverty as ſuch, but of the uncultivated mind; for it is the characteriſtic of unpoliſhed nations to be fond of intoxicating liquors. Whatever be the cauſe, it is notorious, that with the common people the appetite for ſtrong drink is their prevailing appetite. When therefore, by the advance in wages, they obtain more than is ſufficient for their bare ſubſiſtence, they ſpend the ſurplus at the alehouſe, and neglect their buſineſs. Is a man drunk one day? He will have little inclination to work the next. Thus for every drunken fit two days are loſt. By frequent repetition the habit is confirmed, and, by reducing the number of work-

* Dampier, Vol. ii. Part ii. p. 61.

ing

ing days, their value is enhanced. In proportion to this loſs, the price of labour will be raiſed. As long as men have nothing to fear, either for themſelves or for their families, this practice will prevail. Where the price of labour is advanced, the induſtrious and the ſober will by degrees acquire a taſte for luxury. They will not be contented with bare ſubſiſtence, with a ſufficient quantity of coarſe yet wholeſome food, with warm but homeſpun garments, and with healthy but unfurniſhed cottages: they will contract habits of refinement, which, when ſuffered to promote their induſtry, will be uſeful both to themſelves and to the public; but which, in all caſes, will have a tendency to keep up the price of labour, and to advance the price of all thoſe articles which they conſume. Even they who do not work muſt eat, and, by increaſing the demand for corn, will enhance its value, and conſequently the price of labour. In this caſe action and re-action are equal, but not oppoſite. The high price of labour raiſes the value of proviſions, and the

the high price of proviſions enhances the value of labour. They are both increaſed by the preſent ſyſtem of our poor laws, and have both a tendency to check the progreſs of manufactures, and to haſten their departure. The moſt ſpecious argument produced againſt granting a free trade to the ſiſter kingdom was, that, having labour cheap, and not being burthened with a poor's rate, ſhe would be able to underſell us in the market, and thereby ruin our manufactures. Should England repeal the preſent laws, and make a better proviſion for the frugal, the ſober, and the induſtrious, among the poor, Ireland could no longer boaſt of this advantage.

Manufactures always ſeek the cheapeſt countries. As they are leaving the ſouthern counties and travelling to the north, ſo in time will they leave the north, and, to a conſiderable degree, quit the kingdom, unleſs ſome wiſe regulations are eſtabliſhed for the better relief and government of the labouring poor.

The poor laws to a certain degree diſcourage

courage improvements in agriculture; for it is certain, that more waſte land would be taken into tillage, if gentlemen were not alarmed by the increaſing burthen of the poor. Againſt the claims of the church, proviſion has been made by an exemption from tythes for ſeven years; but the demands of the poor admit of no exemption. Monied men have greatly the advantage over the owners and occupiers of land, as being free from thoſe heavy taxes, which the latter pay to the king, to the church, and to the poor. When the poor's rate amounts to ten ſhillings, or even to four ſhillings in the pound, who will be at the expence of clearing, fencing, breaking up, manuring, cropping, the waſte and barren parts of an eſtate? Certainly no gentlemen can do it with a view to profit. In Scotland the ſums are immenſe which have been expended for this purpoſe; but in England a man of property would chooſe rather to take the public for his debtor, than to be himſelf a debtor to the poor; more eſpecially as it it not poſſible for him

him to conjecture what will be the extent of this unlimited rent-charge upon his eſtate. Were it not for this incumbrance agriculture would certainly be puſhed much farther than it has ever been, and many thouſand acres of the poorer commons, heaths, and moors, would be incloſed and cultivated. The beſt writers have complained, that by a tax, ſimilar in its operation to our poor's tax, agriculture in France has been depreſſed, the aſſeſſment being made in proportion to their ſtock in trade. The conduct of the French in this reſpect is not more abſurd than ours. How widely different has been the operation of our land-tax! It has been a ſpur to induſtry, becauſe from the beginning the proportion has been never changed. To be conſiſtent in principle, the legiſlature ſhould either limit the ſum to be collected for the poor, or if agriculture is to be effectually checked, they ſhould equalize the land-tax. Had this tax followed our improvements with a tight graſp, and with a watchful eye, like the church, and like the poor, England

land would not at this day diſcover the ſmiling aſpect which all foreigners admire, when they every where behold our vallies cloathed with flocks, and our hills with corn. A wiſe politician will ſtudy to remove every obſtacle which can retard the progreſs of improvement: but ſuch is the ſyſtem of our laws, that the greater the diſtreſs among the poor, the leſs will be the inducement to cultivate our more ſtubborn and unprofitable lands.

SECT. VI.

A DISTINGUISHED writer of the preſent century has clearly ſtated ſome advantages which the community derives from the introduction of luxury, and would from thence conclude, that private vices are public benefits. His concluſion we cannot grant him; nor can we allow the premiſes, if by luxury be meant any thing inconſiſtent with morality. If in our idea of luxury we include only the comforts and conveniences

ces of life, then a taſte for luxury muſt be productive of induſtry and virtue, muſt increaſe the happineſs of individuals, and promote the welfare of the ſtate. If men were contented to go naked, to lie under hedges, and, according to the fiction of the poets, to feed on acorns, there would be none to labour till the acorns were conſumed. In general the induſtry of man bears proportion to his real or imaginary wants. Could the landlord be contented with the produce of his native ſoil, he would cultivate only what would be ſufficient for the conſumption of his family; or could the labourer be contented with what was barely ſufficient to ſatisfy his hunger, when he no longer felt the cravings of his appetite, he would ceaſe to labour. But as their wants are multiplied, the maſter is willing to employ more workmen, and the workman himſelf is reconciled to conſtant labour. There was a time when the inhabitants of Europe had neither rum, brandy, ſpices, tea, ſugar, nor tobacco: they now covet theſe, and theſe new deſires have produced

ed new efforts to gratify them. There was a time when they had neither linen, ſhoes, nor ſtockings; they now feel the want of theſe, and receive them as the rewards of induſtry. But ſuppoſing that, with theſe new deſires, they could obtain not only linen, ſhoes, and ſtockings, but ſpices, ſpirits, tea, ſugar, and tobacco, without care or labour, what encouragement would they have to induſtry? By the preſent ſyſtem of our poor laws, at leaſt as they are now adminiſtered, the benefits which ariſe from luxury, in promoting induſtry among the labouring poor, are loſt; and the moſt improvident may reſt aſſured, that he ſhall, at all events, ſhare theſe ſuperfluities with the moſt active and laborious; and that in times of ſcarcity his wants ſhall be the *firſt* ſupplied, and his comfort the *firſt* conſulted. To be conſiſtent, the legiſlature ſhould make the ſame proviſion for farmers, manufacturers, and merchants; that in caſe, by their profuſion or neglect of buſineſs, they ſhould be inſolvent, their debts might all be paid, and themſelves, together with their

their families, might be ſupported in the ſtile and manner to which they had been accuſtomed; all out of the revenues of the ſtate, or by ſpecial rates to be collected; not by voluntary donations, but by compulſive payments, and not merely from the opulent, but from thoſe who had themſelves been ſtruggling with poverty and want: nay, to be conſiſtent, they ſhould paſs a law that no man ſhould reap the fruit of his indiſcretion; or, to be perfectly conſiſtent, they ſhould repeal all penal ſtatutes.

Heſiod, in his Georgics, or didactic poem on agriculture, deſcribes with beautiful ſimplicity the excellent effects of emulation, repreſenting two kinds of ſtrife and contention among men; the one productive of violence, the other of peace, harmony, and plenty. The one is intent only upon plunder, whilſt the other ſeeing wealth as attendant upon induſtry, is induced to labour, in order to obtain thoſe comforts which the diligent only can command.

Εις ετερον γαρ τις τε ιδων εργοιο χαλιζων
Πλησιον, ος σπευδει μεν αρομμεναι ηδε φυτευειν,
Οικον τ'ευ θεσθαι· ζηλοι δε τε γειτονα γειτων
Εις αφενον σπευδοντ'· αγαθη δ'ερις ηδε βροτοισι.

E ϰ Ημ. 21.

This principle has been perverted by our laws; and now the perſon who excites the envy and emulation of the lazy and improvident, is not the man who by his activity is acquiring affluence, but the indolent poor in every pariſh, who by his impudence and by his importunity has obtained the moſt ample and the moſt unmerited relief. This our poet has deſcribed as the natural emulation among beggars. Και πτωχος πτωχω φθονεει.

SECT. VII.

IT ſeems to be a law of nature, that the poor ſhould be to a certain degree improvident, that there may always be ſome to fulfil the moſt ſervile, the moſt ſordid, and the moſt ignoble offices in the community. The ſtock of human happineſs is thereby much increaſed, whilſt

whilſt the more delicate are not only relieved from drudgery, and freed from thoſe occaſional employments which would make them miſerable, but are left at liberty, without interruption, to purſue thoſe callings which are ſuited to their various diſpoſitions, and moſt uſeful to the ſtate. As for the loweſt of the poor, by cuſtom they are reconciled to the meaneſt occupations, to the moſt laborious works, and to the moſt hazardous purſuits; whilſt the hope of their reward makes them chearful in the midſt of all their dangers and their toils. The fleets and armies of a ſtate would ſoon be in want of ſoldiers and of ſailors, if ſobriety and diligence univerſally prevailed: for what is it but diſtreſs and poverty which can prevail upon the lower claſſes of the people to encounter all the horrors which await them on the tempeſtuous ocean, or in the field of battle? Men who are eaſy in their circumſtances are not among the foremoſt to engage in a ſeafaring or military life. There muſt be a degree of preſſure, and that which is attended with the leaſt violence will be the beſt. When

hunger is either felt or feared, the deſire of obtaining bread will quietly diſpoſe the mind to undergo the greateſt hardſhips, and will ſweeten the ſevereſt labours. The peaſant with a ſickle in his hand is happier than the prince upon his throne.

Now a fixed, a certain, and a conſtant proviſion for the poor weakens this ſpring; it increaſes their improvidence, but does not promote their chearful compliance with thoſe demands, which the community is obliged to make on the moſt indigent of its members; it tends to deſtroy the harmony and beauty, the ſymmetry and order of that ſyſtem, which God and nature have eſtabliſhed in the world. The improvident among the poor have been advancing in their claims: they now begin to underſtand that they have a legal right to all. When this, which hitherto has been only felt, ſhall be clearly ſeen, and univerſally acknowledged, nothing will remain but to caſt lots, who among the active and the virtuous ſhall perform the vileſt offices for the indolent and vicious.

SECT.

SECT. VIII.

OUR poor laws are not only unjuſt, oppreſſive, and impolitic, nor are they merely by accident inadequate to the purpoſe for which they were deſigned; but they proceed upon principles which border on abſurdity, as profeſſing to accompliſh that which, in the very nature and conſtitution of the world, is impracticable. They ſay, that in England no man, even though by his indolence, improvidence, prodigality, and vice, he may have brought himſelf to poverty, ſhall ever ſuffer want. In the progreſs of ſociety, it will be found, that ſome muſt want; and then the only queſtion will be this, Who is moſt worthy to ſuffer cold and hunger, the prodigal or the provident, the ſlothful or the diligent, the virtuous or the vicious? In the South Seas there is an iſland, which from the firſt diſcoverer is called Juan Fernandes. In this ſequeſtered ſpot, John Fernando placed a colony of goats, conſiſting of one

male, attended by his female. This happy couple finding paſture in abundance, could readily obey the firſt commandment, to increaſe and multiply, till in proceſs of time they had repleniſhed their little iſland *. In advancing to this period they were ſtrangers to miſery and want, and ſeemed to glory in their numbers: but from this unhappy moment they began to ſuffer hunger; yet continuing for a time to increaſe their numbers, had they been endued with reaſon, they muſt have apprehended the extremity of famine. In this ſituation the weakeſt firſt gave way, and plenty was again reſtored. Thus they fluctuated between happineſs and miſery, and either ſuffered want or rejoiced in abundance, according as their numbers were diminiſhed or increaſed; never at a ſtay, yet nearly balancing at all times their quantity of food. This degree of æquipoiſe was from time to time deſtroyed, either by epidemical diſeaſes or by the arrival of ſome veſſel in diſtreſs. On

* Dampier, Vol. i. Part ii. p. 88.

ſuch

ſuch occaſions their numbers were conſiderably reduced; but to compenſate for this alarm, and to comfort them for the loſs of their companions, the ſurvivors never failed immediately to meet returning plenty. They were no longer in fear of famine: they ceaſed to regard each other with an evil eye; all had abundance, all were contented, all were happy. Thus, what might have been conſidered as misfortunes, proved a ſource of comfort; and, to them at leaſt, partial evil was univerſal good.

When the Spaniards found that the Engliſh privateers reſorted to this iſland for proviſions, they reſolved on the total extirpation of the goats, and for this purpoſe they put on ſhore a greyhound dog and bitch *. Theſe in their turn increaſed and multiplied, in proportion to the quantity of food they met with; but in conſequence, as the Spaniards had foreſeen, the breed of goats diminiſhed. Had they been totally deſtroyed, the dogs like-

* Ulloa, B. ii. C. 4.

wiſe muſt have periſhed. But as many of the goats retired to the craggy rocks, where the dogs could never follow them, deſcending only for ſhort intervals to feed with fear and circumſpection in the vallies, few of theſe, beſides the careleſs and the raſh, became a prey; and none but the moſt watchful, ſtrong, and active of the dogs could get a ſufficiency of food. Thus a new kind of balance was eſtabliſhed. The weakeſt of both ſpecies were among the firſt to pay the debt of nature; the moſt active and vigorous preſerved their lives. It is the quantity of food which regulates the numbers of the human ſpecies. In the woods, and in the *ſavage ſtate*, there can be few inhabitants; but of theſe there will be only a proportionable few to ſuffer want. As long as food is plenty they will continue to increaſe and multiply; and every man will have ability to ſupport his family, or to relieve his friends, in proportion to his activity and ſtrength. The weak muſt depend upon the precarious bounty of the ſtrong; and, ſooner or later, the lazy will

will be left to ſuffer the natural conſequence of their indolence. Should they introduce a community of goods, and at the ſame time leave every man at liberty to marry, they would at firſt increaſe their numbers, but not the ſum total of their happineſs, till by degrees, all being equally reduced to want and miſery, the weakly would be the firſt to periſh.

To procure a more ample, certain, and regular ſupply of food, ſhould they cut down their woods and take to *breeding cattle*, this plenty would be of long continuance; but in proceſs of time its limits would be found. The moſt active would acquire property, would have numerous flocks and numerous families; whilſt the indolent would either ſtarve or become ſervants to the rich, and the community would continue to enlarge till it had found its natural bounds, and balanced the quantity of food.

Should they proceed to *agriculture*, theſe bounds would be much extended, and require ages before the ſtraitneſs would be felt again. In proceſs of time a compleat

diviſion

diviſion of labour would take place, and they would have not only huſbandmen, but artiſts, manufacturers, and merchants, monied men and gentlemen of landed property, ſoldiers and men of letters, with all their ſervants, to exchange their various commodities and labours for the produce of the ſoil. A noble author, in the north of Britain, is of opinion, that "a nation can ſcarce be too populous for huſbandry, as agriculture has the ſingular property of producing food in proportion to the number of conſumers *." But is it not clear, that when all that is fertile has been cultivated to the higheſt pitch of induſtry, the progreſs muſt of neceſſity be ſtopped, and that when the human ſpecies ſhall have multiplied in proportion to this increaſe of food, it can proceed no further? Indeed, as we have remarked already of the ſavage ſtate, ſhould they eſtabliſh a community of goods, their numbers for a time would certainly increaſe; but the

* Sketches on Man, p. 56.

quantity

quantity of food not being augmented in proportion, and that which had been ſufficient only for a given number being now diſtributed to the increaſing multitude, all would have too little, and the weakly would periſh ſooner than if he who tilled the ſoil had been left to reap the undivided fruits of his induſtry and labour. Nations may for a time increaſe their numbers beyond the due proportion of their food, but they will in the ſame proportion deſtroy the eaſe and comfort of the affluent, and, without any poſſible advantage, give univerſality to that miſery and want, which had been only partial. The courſe of nature may be eaſily diſturbed, but man will never be able to reverſe its laws.

The earth is no where more fertile than it is in China, nor does any country abound ſo much in people; yet the cries of deſerted children prove, that even they have found limits to their population. Few countries have been more productive than the land of Canaan was; a land deſcribed as flowing with milk and honey,

fertile

fertile in corn, and rich in paſtures: yet even in the land of Canaan they had many poor; and it was ſaid to them, but not in the way of threatening, "the poor ſhall never ceaſe from among you*." Indeed it was impoſſible they ever ſhould, becauſe whilſt men have appetites and paſſions, what but diſtreſs and poverty can ſtop the progreſs of population? The inhabitants of Europe are ſaid to have doubled their numbers every five hundred years: from which we may infer that their quantity of food has been doubled in theſe periods. Throughout America, for the ſame reaſon, they have been doubled every five-and-twenty years; and in ſome colonies, in the ſpace of fifteen years.

If a new and equal diviſion of property were made in England, we cannot doubt that the ſame inequality which we now obſerve would ſoon take place again: the improvident, the lazy, and the vicious, would diſſipate their ſubſtance; the prudent, the active, and the virtuous, would

* Deut. xv. 11.

again

again increaſe their wealth. If the legiſlature were to make this diſtribution, the evil would not be equal to the injuſtice of the meaſure: things would ſoon return into their proper channel, order and ſubordination would be again reſtored, diligence would be encouraged, and the virtuous would be fed. But by eſtabliſhing a permanent community of goods, and neither increaſing the quantity of food, nor limiting the number of thoſe who are to ſhare it, they divert the occaſional ſurplus of national wealth from the induſtrious to the lazy, they increaſe the number of unprofitable citizens, and ſow the ſeeds of miſery for the whole community; increaſing the general diſtreſs, and cauſing more to die for want, than if poverty had been left to find its proper channel.

It is well known that our commons, without ſtint, ſtarve all our cattle. Here we clearly ſee the natural effects of that community of goods, which the poor laws would render univerſal. In the infancy of the Chriſtian church, this experiment was fairly tried; but even whilſt

the Apoſtles, bleſt with a perfect knowledge of the human heart, were yet alive, it was found to be intolerable. We have adopted it in England; and what has been the conſequence? Are poverty and wretchedneſs unknown? or rather, are not poverty and wretchedneſs increaſing daily, in exact proportion with our efforts to reſtrain them? One of the neateſt writers of the Engliſh nation, who underſtood this ſubject, has well obſerved, "the ſufferings of the poor are leſs known than their miſdeeds: they ſtarve, and freeze, and rot among themſelves; but they beg, and ſteal, and rob among their betters. There is not a pariſh in the liberty of Weſtminſter, which doth not raiſe thouſands annually for the poor; and there is not a ſtreet in that liberty, which doth not ſwarm all day with beggars, and all night with thieves." His expreſſion is nervous, his deſcription animated; but even the ſimple truth, when diveſted of all its ornaments, muſt excite aſtoniſhment. The effect is ſtriking; but the cauſe of this phænomenon will be evident to thoſe only

only who can examine it with a fixed attention.

There is a pariſh in the Weſt of England which has never wanted poor, and in which, excepting for one ſhort period, the poor have never wanted work; yet their poverty and miſery have uniformly advanced conſtantly, outſtripping all efforts which have been made to provide for their diſtreſs. The farmers at this time pay ten ſhillings in the pound on the improved rents; yet wretchedneſs ſeems to have taken up its reſidence in every cottage, and the moſt miſerable are they whoſe gains have been the greateſt.

SECT. IX.

ON the ſubject of population we have had warm diſputes, whilſt ſome have lamented that our numbers are decreaſing, and others with confidence have boaſted that our population has rapidly advanced; all ſeeming to be agreed, that the wealth of a country conſiſts in the number of its inhabitants. When induſtry

and frugality keep pace with population, or rather when population is only the conſequence of theſe, the ſtrength and riches of a nation will bear proportion to the number of its citizens: but when the increaſe of people is unnatural and forced, when it ariſes only from a community of goods, it tends to poverty and weakneſs. In reſpect to population, ſome countries will reach their ne plus ultra ſooner, and ſome later, according as they ſurmount the obſtacles which impede their progreſs. This period can be retarded by improvements in agriculture, by living harder or by working more, by extenſive conqueſts or by increaſing commerce.

The cultivation of rice in China enabled them to feed ſome millions of people, more than could have been maintained by any other grain; whereas in the highlands of Scotland, where neither rice nor yet wheat will grow, the inhabitants ſoon became a burthen to the ſoil. Their chief dependance for ſupporting the preſent population is on frugality, and conſtant, ſteady, unremitted labour, without

any

any hope of being able to advance their numbers. Oatmeal and water, with a little milk, is their common food, and to procure this they work as long as they can ſee. They till the ſoil; they watch their cattle; and, at their leiſure hours, they ſpin all the linen and the woollen which their families conſume.

The Romans, even when they had loſt their domeſtic induſtry and habits of œconomy, were able to feed their increaſing citizens by tribute from the diſtant provinces, as the Spaniards do by purchaſing proviſions with the gold and ſilver of Peru. The Dutch have no other refuge but in good government, induſtry, and commerce, for which their ſituation is moſt favourable. Their paſtures are rich, but not ſufficient to maintain half the number of their inhabitants, who are employed and fed by every nation upon earth, but reſide in Holland for the convenience of the water-carriage, the ſecurity of their perſons, and the protection of their property.

When a country is ſo far advanced in population as to be diſtreſſed for food;

and when the forementioned reſources have been exhauſted, it has then reached its utmoſt limits; and in ſuch a caſe, againſt increaſing want there can be two remedies only which are natural, and one unnatural: for either none muſt marry, but they who can maintain a family, or elſe all who are in diſtreſs muſt emigrate. If theſe natural remedies are rejected, it can remain only for the poor to expoſe their children the moment they are born, which is the horrid practice adopted in the richeſt country upon earth to preſerve the community from famine. With regard to celibacy, we may obſerve, that where things are left to a courſe of nature, one paſſion regulates another, and the ſtronger appetite reſtrains the weaker. There is an appetite, which is and ſhould be urgent, but which, if left to operate without reſtraint, would multiply the human ſpecies before proviſion could be made for their ſupport. Some check, ſome balance is therefore abſolutely needful, and hunger is the proper balance; hunger, not as directly felt, or feared by the individual

vidual for himſelf, but as foreſeen and feared for his immediate offspring. Were it not for this the equilibrium would not be preſerved ſo near as it is at preſent in the world, between the numbers of people and the quantity of food. Various are the circumſtances to be obſerved in different nations, which tend to blunt the ſhafts of Cupid, or at leaſt to quench the torch of Hymen. In many parts of Europe we ſee multitudes of both ſexes, not from policy, but from ſuperſtition and religious prejudice, bound by irrevocable vows of chaſtity. In other parts we hear of numbers who are compelled to ſpend their days in a ſeraglio, where it is not to be expected that all ſhould be prolific; whilſt in conſequence of this unjuſtifiable practice, a correſponding number muſt paſs through the world without leaving a repreſentative behind them. But in every country, at leaſt on this ſide the Atlantic Ocean, we find a ſimilar effect from prudence; and without the aſſiſtance of either a ſeraglio, or a convent, the younger branches of the beſt families have been

left to wither. In every country multitudes would marry, if they had a comfortable proſpect for themſelves, and for their children; but if all ſhould liſten to this call of nature, deaf to a louder call, the whole world in a few years would be diſtreſſed with famine. Yet, even in ſuch a caſe, when it is impolitic that all ſhould marry, this ſhould be wholly left to every man's diſcretion, and to that balance of the appetites which nature has eſtabliſhed. But if, notwithſtanding the reſtraints of diſtreſs and poverty, they who are not able to maintain a family will yet marry, there can be no reſource but in emigration. In the highlands of Scotland, when the inhabitants became a burthen to the ſoil, they tried every poſſible expedient; and, when all others failed, their young men with reluctance turned their back upon a country which was not able to ſupport them. It is well known that their emigrations are conſiderable. They do not iſſue forth in aſſembled multitudes, like ſwarms from the northern hives of old; nor do they, like a torrent, over-

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flow and deſolate the adjacent countries; but, like the ſilent dew, they drop upon the richeſt paſtures, and wandering to the remoteſt corners of the earth in queſt of food, with the induſtry of bees they collect their honey from the moſt luxuriant flowers. Theſe active, hardy, and laborious people, are to be found in the temperate, in the torrid, and in the frigid zones, in every iſland, and on every habitable mountain of Europe, Aſia, Africa, and America. Yet in their native country the numbers never fail: the ſupply is conſtant. Now, if, inſtead of collecting for themſelves wherever food is to be found, theſe wanderers had been equally ſupported on their barren mountains by contributions from the more fertile vallies of the South, can we imagine that the births in Scotland would be fewer than they are at preſent? The overflowings of their population might have been accelerated, but could not thereby have been retarded. Having no contributions from the South, they have quitted their country, and made room for others. We are

told, upon the beſt authority *, that in the highlands of Scotland, a woman will bring twenty children into the world, and rear only two. Had ſhe ſufficient food for more, more would live. The women there, like the women in all countries which are come to their utmoſt height of population, are more prolific than the ſoil. To provide more food on their bleak and barren mountains, is beyond a queſtion. But if now, to rear theſe twenty children, a poor's rate were to be collected in more fertile countries, yet in countries which are fully peopled in proportion to their labour and to the produce of the ſoil, is it not evident, that the ſcarcity and diſtreſs would only be transferred, and that the children of the South muſt die, that the children of the North might live? But ſuppoſing theſe ſhould live; yet at beſt they could only take the place of thoſe that died, and more women in the North would increaſe and multiply, till they felt the ſame degree of preſſure which they feel at preſent. Neither Switzerland nor the coaſt of Af-

* Smith, Wealth of Nations.

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rica are depopulated by emigrations, becauſe the quantity of food in each remains unaltered. It is with the human ſpecies as with all other articles of trade without a premium; the demand will regulate the market.

By eſtabliſhing a community of goods, or rather by giving to the idle and to the vicious the *firſt* claim upon the produce of the earth, many of the more prudent, careful, and induſtrious citizens are ſtraitened in their circumſtances, and reſtrained from marriage. The farmer breeds only from the beſt of all his cattle; but our laws chooſe rather to preſerve the worſt, and ſeem to be anxious leſt the breed ſhould fail. The cry is, Population, population! population at all events! But is there any reaſonable fear of depopulation? We have ſeen that corn upon an average has been conſiderably cheaper ſince the commencement of the preſent century, than it was for an equal term before; yet wages have been raiſed in the proportion of ſix to four, and the rent of land is doubled. May we not infer from

hence, that the produce of the ſoil muſt have increaſed nearly in the ſame proportions. If we conſider the improvements which have been made in agriculture, by clearing woods, incloſing waſtes, draining moraſſes, laying the common fields in ſeveralty, and making roads; by the introduction of clover, ſaintfoin, turneps, and potatoes; by the breaking up of extenſive downs; and by the ſuperior ſkill of the preſent race in the management of all ſorts of land, with reſpect to ſtocking, manuring, cropping, not forgetting their ſuperior weight of capital to work with; we ſhall ceaſe to wonder at this vaſt increaſe of produce. But is it poſſible that the produce ſhould be thus increaſed, and not the people alſo who conſume it? We need not deſire any man to viſit London, Norwich, Bath, Briſtol, Hull, Liverpool, Leeds, Wakefield, Mancheſter, and Birmingham; we need not call upon him to view our mines of coal, copper, lead, iron, and tin, with all the new manufactures which depend on theſe: but let him at leaſt count our flocks, and calculate

calculate the quantity of corn produced by recent improvements in our tillage; then let him aſk himſelf if our population is increaſed.

Whilſt food is to be had, there is no fear of wanting people. But ſhould the population of a country get beyond the produce of the ſoil, and of the capital engaged in trade, how ſhall theſe people find employment? Whenever this ſhall be the caſe, the evil will increaſe, and the capital will go on conſtantly diminiſhing; like as in private life, when a gentleman breaks in upon his principal to pay the ordinary expences of his family. When a trading nation is obliged to ſpend more than the revenue which is derived from commerce, and not from accident, but as the effect of ſome abiding cauſe, exceeds continually the profit of its trade, without ſome ſubſtantial reformation, the ruin of that nation will be inevitable. Should the capital itſelf accumulate, the intereſt of money would he lowered, the demand for labour would increaſe, and the ſuperlucration

tion on this increaſe of trade would continue to enlarge the capital. Speculation apart, it is a fact, that in England we have more than we can feed, and many more than we can profitably employ under the preſent ſyſtem of our laws.

SECT. X.

ALL the effects which I have been deſcribing, have not been fully felt. Let it however be remembered, that a diſtinction muſt be made between thoſe evils which have already been ſeverely felt, and the greater evils which in the courſe of nature and due time may be expected. The tendency of a law may be moſt deſtructive; yet, by adventitious circumſtances, the bad conſequences may be checked and prevented for a ſeaſon. It is not to be imagined that men, who by cloſe application and watchful attention to their buſineſs, by rigid frugality and hard labour, have made a decent proviſion for their

their families, ſhould freely part with a conſiderable proportion of their property, or ſuffer it to be taken from them without ſtrong efforts to retain it. For more than a century the ſtruggles have been obſtinate and unremitted, yet for more than a century the poor's rates have been conſtantly increaſing. From time to time, as men remarked the rapidity of this progreſs, their exertions were more than common, and ſome tranſient reformation was effected. When at laſt they found, that they had no other way remaining to protect the fruits of induſtry from the extravagant demands of indolence, and from the undiſtinguiſhing benevolence of power, they adopted, from neceſſity and not from choice, the miſerable expedient of building workhouſes. Till theſe are completely filled, and even after they are full, they ſerve a double purpoſe: they diſarm the magiſtrate, they intimidate the poor.

As the law now ſtands, the pariſh officers, in certain caſes, may build houſes on the waſte for the reception of the impotent and aged; but they have been hitherto

therto ſo prudent as not to exerciſe a power, which would be deſtructive to themſelves, without being beneficial to the poor. Happily the juſtices of peace have no legal authority to augment the number of our cottages. There can be no compulſion in this caſe. Some of them indeed have indirectly attempted this, but they have been reſiſted by the more provident and wary in moſt pariſhes. Hence the number of houſes becomes a gage, at once to meaſure and to regulate the extent of population. In every village will be found plenty of young men and women, who only wait for habitations to lay the foundation of new families, and who with joy would haſten to the altar, if they could be certain of a roof to ſhelter them at night. It has been chiefly from the want of houſes that the poor have not more rapidly increaſed. If the moſt opulent pariſhes in the kingdom were obliged to find habitations, as they are to provide work, or food and raiment for the poor, they would be themſelves reduced in a courſe of years to ſuch extreme diſtreſs, that

that all moveable ſtock would be carried off, the land would be left uncultivated, the houſes would go to ruin, and the poor would ſtarve. As the rents have been advancing, new houſes have been built; but hitherto the progreſs has been retarded by the ſuperior value of money in the public funds. Should the preſent law ſubſiſt, the value of land will ſink, and the rent of cottages will riſe; each in proportion to the burthen of the poor, and the demand for houſes. It is true, by a ſtatute made in the thirty-firſt year of Queen Elizabeth, there is a penalty on every perſon who ſhall build a cottage without aſſigning four acres of land to be held for ever with it: but this ſtatute, with which her famous poor law is in perfect harmony, and which, if obſerved, would have prevented the greateſt evils felt and to be feared from that unlimited proviſion for the poor, has been long neglected, or perhaps was never regarded. The penalty is ten pounds for the firſt erection of the cottage, and forty ſhillings per month as long as it ſhall be occupied.

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Had this law remained in force, or had it been conſtantly obſerved, the poor would not have multiplied; but then the manufactures would not have flouriſhed in the kingdom as they do at preſent. Under this law it is evident, that no poor man could marry till there was a cottage vacant to receive him; for no inmates were allowed.

The laſt circumſtance which remains to be aſſigned, as having checked and prevented for a ſeaſon the evil conſequences reſulting from our poor laws, is the ſhame and reproach of being relieved by a pariſh: but theſe have long ſince ceaſed to operate. It is high time, therefore, that more effectual proviſion ſhould be made for the protection of induſtry in affluence, and for the relief of induſtry in the ſeaſons of diſtreſs.

SECT. XI.

THE beſt politicians in Europe have condemned the preſent ſyſtem of our poor laws. Among theſe we may reckon two great

great and diſtinguiſhed writers; one univerſally admired for his incomparable work on the ſpirit of laws; the other for his moſt elegant and judicious comment on the laws of England. A nobleman, who ſtands foremoſt among the literati in the north of Britain, has more freely and more fully delivered his opinion, and perfectly coincides in ſentiment with thoſe able lawyers. Theſe reſpectable authors have condemned the principles, whilſt others have blamed only the execution of our laws. But all who are even in the leaſt degree acquainted with the ſubject have lamented, that two millions ſhould be annually expended on the poor without relieving their diſtreſs.

SECT. XII.

IF it were poſſible to meet with proper perſons to execute our laws, they would not be ſo hurtful to the community as they are at preſent. But where ſhall we find men qualified to be at once truſtees and guardians for the public and for

the poor? An overſeer ſhould be endued with more than common patience; willing to hear with calmneſs and compoſure the complaints of the moſt untoward and perverſe; bleſt with a command of temper ſuch as few poſſeſs. He ſhould be diligent and active, that he may viſit the habitations of the poor, and examine with his own eyes the nature, the extent, and the cauſe of their diſtreſs. He ſhould be a man of good underſtanding, ſharp, ſenſible, and well-informed, that he may know what is the beſt, the cheapeſt, and the moſt effectual method, at once to relieve and to employ the poor. He ſhould be a man of penetration, quick in diſcerning, and ready in detecting the falſe pretences of impoſtors. He ſhould be a man of the moſt humane and compaſſionate diſpoſition; not merely that he may ſhed the ſympathizing tear, but that he may exert himſelf to the utmoſt to comfort and ſupport the ſick, and properly to ſweeten the bitter cup for thoſe who are drinking the dregs of life. He ſhould be at the ſame time a man of firmneſs and

reſolution;

reſolution; not to be worn out and teazed into compliance, nor yet to be moved either by threats or by deceitful tears. He ſhould be inexorably juſt, conſidering the public fund, out of which he is to relieve the poor, as a moſt ſacred depoſit committed to his care, in confidence that he will adminiſter it to the beſt of his judgment and ability. He ſhould be a man of a diſintereſted and honeſt diſpoſition, that, in the diſcharge of this important truſt, he may neither directly nor indirectly defraud the public, either to favour his friends or to promote his trade. In one word, if in him ſhould centre all the excellencies, which are ſcattered with a ſparing hand among the human race; if he had no other trade, occupation, or purſuit which required his attention; if, thus qualified, he were willing to give up his time for the benefit of the public, and for the comfort of the poor; if a ſucceſſion of ſuch were to be found, and if their power were ſupreme, ſubject to no controul from the interference of a magiſtrate; the burthen might yet be tolerable, and ſome

of the evils, naturally attendant on the preſent ſyſtem of our poor laws, inſtead of being ſeverely felt, would for the preſent be ſeen only at a diſtance.

Many pariſhes have been ſenſible of this difficulty, more eſpecially in the cloathing counties: but as if, whilſt they ſeverely felt it, they had only indiſtinctly ſeen it, they have made application to parliament, complaining that the buſineſs was too much for the attendance and attention of four overſeers; and therefore praying, that one additional overſeer might be appointed with abſolute and ſole authority to grant relief. Their argument appears to be abſurd, but their meaning is preciſe and clear. They would be thus at liberty to chooſe the moſt proper perſon for the charge; and he, having little elſe to do, could pay more attention to the buſineſs. The event has in ſome meaſure anſwered their expectation; but, at beſt, this can be conſidered only as a good expedient to palliate one of thoſe many bad effects which flow from a pernicious law.

SECT.

SECT. XIII.

TO remedy theſe evils, various have been the ſchemes recommended to the public, by men who have been revered for the ſtrength of their underſtandings, the extent of their knowledge, and the uprightneſs of their intentions. They have chiefly recommended palliatives; and ſuch only have been tried, yet with little or with no effect. They have indeed checked the evil for a time, and only for a time, to return with accumulated force: for, notwithſtanding all their efforts, the tax collected to relieve the poor is ſwelled in many places from ten or twelve pounds annually to five hundred pounds a year, where no manufactures have been eſtabliſhed; and in the manufacturing pariſhes, from little or nothing to fifteen hundred, two thouſand, and even three thouſand pounds a year.

The legiſlature began with requiring the conſent of two juſtices of peace, before the overſeers could have power to relieve

the poor *. They then inſiſted that none ſhould be relieved, but thoſe who were put upon the liſt by the pariſhioners aſſembled in their veſtry, or by authority under the hand of a juſtice †. After this it was enacted, that no juſtice of peace ſhould grant an order, without having examined upon oath the party making application to him for relief ‡. Upon all theſe occaſions we hear the legiſlature conſtantly complaining that the evil ſtill went on increaſing.

The expedient which has been moſt often tried, has been to compel both the pauper and his family to wear the Roman P in ſcarlet cloth upon their ſhoulders §; and from this much was expected, but in vain. It has operated, indeed, as a partial repeal of a bad law, repealing however all that could be conſidered as valuable, and leaving all that is noxious to the ſtate; diſcouraging only the ingenuous, the modeſt, and the meek, that there

* 43 Eliz.

† 3 and 4 W. and M.

‡ 9 Geo. I. c. 7.

§ 8 and 9 W. c. 30. ſ. 2.

may

may be the more for thoſe who, loſt to ſhame, have long ſince forgot to bluſh. Of all human inventions, none can be more cruel than this. You invite the poor, you offer him relief, but you will give it only upon this condition, that he ſhall receive it with a mark of infamy. The overſeers are liable to a fine, if they do not impoſe this mark upon the indigent; but ſuch is their humanity, that they riſk the penalty rather than reproach the wretched with his poverty. Should they give this badge to ſome, they muſt impoſe it upon all. The worthleſs and the impudent would not regard it; the modeſt would ſooner die than wear it. There is no doubt that time would reconcile them to it, more eſpecially when they ſaw none or few without it; but then, what purpoſe would it anſwer? Whilſt it took effect, it would be hurtful: when it ceaſed to operate, it would be uſeleſs.

Finding the futility of this device, the moſt common refuge has been to parochial and provincial workhouſes; againſt which there appear inſuperable objections.

It was thought, that with watchful attention the poor would do more work under one roof, and be fed much cheaper, than when diſperſed in their ſeveral cottages. An expectation, however, which experience has never yet confirmed. Even in parochial workhouſes, and in thoſe which are under the beſt regulation, the poor do ſo little work, that the produce of their labour almoſt eſcapes our notice, whilſt they are maintained at a moſt enormous expence. In their cottages they might live comfortably on the average of four pounds each; whereas under the management of the public they coſt from five to ten, and even twelve pounds each, per annum. It is not reaſonable to imagine, that men, deprived of liberty, will work for others with the ſame chearful activity as when working for themſelves; or that they will be contented with the hard and homely fare, which they could eat with thankfulneſs, whilſt as freemen they were ſurrounded with their friends. It is hope that muſt ſweeten all our labours. Let a man have no purſuit, no exerciſe

for

for his hopes and fears, and you may as well take the marrow from his bones, which was deſigned by nature to ſupple all his joints. You may feed him well; but, without making him a more uſeful member in ſociety, you will leave him to drag on a miſerable exiſtence, a burthen to himſelf and to the public. It is now a maxim univerſally received, that the ſervice of a ſlave is the deareſt ſervice which can be had. Let a man conſult his own feelings, and the reaſon will be obvious.

The terror of being ſent to a workhouſe acts like an abolition of the poor's tax on all who dread the loſs of liberty. It is in effect a virtual repeal, as far as it extends, of thoſe laws, which ſhould long ſince have given place to better regulations. But unfortunately the moſt worthy objects ſuffer moſt by this repeal, and the advantage to the public is little more than negative. The quiet and the cleanly dread the noiſe and naſtineſs, even more than the confinement of a workhouſe. They pant for the pure and whole-

ſome air, which they can never hope to breathe where numbers are confined within narrow limits, and ſigh for that ſerenity and peace, which they muſt deſpair to find where the moſt profligate of the human ſpecies are met together. By the fear of being ſentenced to ſuch ſociety, many, who deſerve a better fate, ſtruggle with poverty till they ſink under the burthen of their miſery. Againſt county workhouſes, improperly called houſes of induſtry, the objections are much ſtronger. The buildings, the furniture, the ſalaries, the waſte, and the impoſition, every thing is upon a large and expenſive ſcale, without its being poſſible to preſerve, for any length of time, a ſyſtem of œconomy. At firſt, indeed, there might be great exertion; but the novelty being over, few gentlemen would be found public ſpirited enough to continue their attendance and attention to a buſineſs in which, as individuals, they would be ſo little intereſted, and for which they muſt give up more important or more pleaſant engagements and purſuits. By experience it is found,

found, that without reckoning intereſt upon the prime coſt of either furniture or buildings, the poor in theſe extenſive eſtabliſhments are not maintained for leſs than I have ſtated. But whilſt the expence is ſo enormous, are they happy? Far from happy, they are wretched. With all the diſcomforts of a parochial workhouſe, they feel themſelves in a hopeleſs ſtate of baniſhment from their relations and connections. It is true, they eat, they drink, and they are miſerable. This kind of baniſhment has the ſame effect in part as a repeal of the poor laws, becauſe few are willing to be thus relieved. Theſe houſes of induſtry cannot be vindicated, either in point of comfort or œconomy: if they have therefore any merit, it can be only that kind of merit which I have ſtated; and if it be wiſe to have recourſe to them, it would be much wiſer directly to repeal the laws, againſt the depredations of which theſe houſes are to protect your property. A county workhouſe, at beſt, may be conſidered as a colony to which a few of the ſuperabundant

dant members of the community have been tranſported to make room for others; or it may be conſidered as a new manufacture, beneficial in its progreſs to employ the idle hands; beneficial, if it were poſſible to make a profit on their labour; yet like other manufactures, under the preſent ſyſtem of our laws, increaſing the number and the diſtreſſes of the poor.

That gentlemen of landed property ſhould have taken the alarm, and that all who feel the burthen of the poor ſhould wiſh to be relieved, is not to be wondered at. Yet ſurely we may be permitted to expreſs aſtoniſhment, that when in the year 1775 the Houſe of Commons were to provide a remedy for the growing evil, no expedient ſhould preſent itſelf, but to erect county workhouſes.

They reſolved, 1°. That the laws relating to the poor are defective, and the good purpoſes intended by them in many reſpects prevented.

2°. That the money raiſed for the relief of the poor is a grievous, and, if no

new

new regulations are made, will be an increaſing burthen upon the public.

They then recommended county workhouſes, leaving the pariſhes at liberty to draw at diſcretion on the county ſtock, for the relief of ſuch as were not proper objects for a workhouſe.

The counties, however, were not weak enough to accept an offer which muſt have entailed a tax of four ſhillings in the pound on their eſtates for ever, without procuring any benefit to the public, to the land-owner, to the farmer, or to the poor.

Another expedient, and the laſt which I ſhall mention, is the moſt abominable that ever was invented: it is to farm the poor. In ſome pariſhes they are farmed at ſo much an head, but in others the contract is for a given ſum. In one pariſh in Glouceſterſhire a contractor has agreed to take all the expence of the poor upon himſelf for a very moderate conſideration. Taking the preſent numbers in confinement, he has only two ſhillings a week for each;

each; yet out of this he is to be at the charge of all litigations and removals, and to relieve all others who are not proper objects for a workhouſe, and after all to make a profit for himſelf.

All theſe expedients have the ſame tendency. They are adopted with a profeſſed intention to lower the poor rates; and it is confeſſed, that many are thereby deterred from making application for relief, who would otherwiſe be a burthen to the public. But then is not this a partial, impolitic, oppreſſive repeal of a bad law, without reducing the tax; for it continues to increaſe, and without making a better proviſion for thoſe among the poor who are moſt worthy of attention?

Having thus endeavoured to diſplay the imperfections which are moſt obvious in our management of the poor, let us now examine the proviſion made for their relief by other nations.

In the early ages of the world there could be no great difficulty in this matter, as the quantity of food was more than could be conſumed. In proceſs of time,

time, when property had got footing in the world, they, who had neither flocks nor herds, became ſlaves, and, ſelling themſelves for bread, together with their children, conſtituted the principal treaſure of the rich. When the rich had ſo far increaſed their ſtock, that their cattle had not ſufficient room to feed, they quitted their ancient habitations, and ſought new ſettlements. Thus it is ſaid, that Abraham was very rich in cattle, that he had ſheep and oxen, and men ſervants and maid ſervants, and camels and aſſes, and ſilver and gold. The ſame nearly was the proſperity of Lot. But when the land was not able to bear them with their flocks and with their herds, they agreed to part, and Lot choſe for himſelf the plains of Jordan. When the offſpring of Abraham ſettled in the land of Canaan, they continued the ſame mode of relieving the diſtreſſed, only with this exception, that in the ſeventh year the poor, who had ſold himſelf, was to go out free. This cuſtom of exchanging their liberty for bread was followed by moſt of the nations

tions upon earth, and was the general practice of the world, till Chriſtianity prevailed, and became the eſtabliſhed religion of the Roman empire. The milder genius of this religion, which proclaims liberty to the captive, and the opening of the priſon doors to them that are bound, abhorrent to ſlavery in all its forms, has almoſt baniſhed that cruel cuſtom from our world; and in its ſtead has made the beſt poſſible proviſion for the poor, leaving them to be ſupported by the free bounty of the rich. It is true, the miſtaken zeal of its firſt converts, inflamed by the expectation of that tranſcendent glory which the goſpel had revealed to them, poured contempt upon their viſible poſſeſſions of houſes and of lands. Theſe they ſold, and being all of one heart, and of one ſoul, they agreed to have all things common *. But no ſuch community of goods received the ſanction of divine authority. When Peter reproached Ananias, it was for his falſehood only: "Whilſt

* Acts iv. 32.

the land remained, was it not thine own; and after it was ſold, was it not in thine own power * ?"

The poſitive injunctions of the goſpel are clear and diſtinct, and ſhould never have been forgot. "Every man according as he purpoſeth in his heart, ſo let him give; not grudgingly, or of neceſſity: for God loveth a chearful giver †." Theſe voluntary contributions were collected on the firſt day of every week, when they aſſembled at their public worſhip. The Chriſtian diſpenſation gives the higheſt encouragement to the overflowings of benevolence, but at the ſame time leaves every man at liberty to give or not to give, proceeding upon this maxim, that it ſhould be lawful for a man to do what he will with his own. Whilſt however the followers of this religion are left to their own judgment and diſcretion, they are under the ſtrongeſt obligations to be liberal in their donations, and to relieve the diſtreſſes of their

* Acts v. 4. † 2 Cor. ix. 7.

fellow

fellow creatures to the utmoſt of their ability. In the deſcription of the great and final judgment of the word, it is ſaid, "When the Son of man ſhall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then ſhall he ſit upon the throne of his glory. And before him ſhall be gathered all nations; and he ſhall ſeparate them one from another, as a ſhepherd divideth his ſheep from the goats: And he ſhall ſet the ſheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then ſhall the King ſay unto them on his right hand, Come, ye bleſſed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirſty, and ye gave me drink: I was a ſtranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was ſick, and ye viſited me: I was in priſon, and ye came unto me. For inaſmuch as ye did it unto one of the leaſt of theſe my brethren, ye did it unto me*." From this deſcription we muſt not too haſtily conclude that the

* Matt. xxv.

charity

charity of Chriſtians is to be indiſcriminate and blind. Among the various objects of diſtreſs a choice is to be made, ſelecting firſt thoſe which are moſt worthy, and reſerving the reſidue for thoſe who have nothing but their miſery to excite compaſſion. Let the virtuous citizen be fed, then let the profligate and the prodigal ſhare all that prudence and frugality ſhall have left behind them. To reverſe this order is neither politic nor juſt: for ſurely nothing can be more inconſiſtent with equity, than to give the bread of induſtry to indolence and vice. Chriſtian charity was never meant to diſcourage diligence and application, nor to promote among men a wanton diſſipation of their ſubſtance. The Apoſtle of the Gentiles, both by example and by precept, teaches a leſſon which too many among the poor have yet to learn. We hear him thus appealing to his converts: "We did not eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travel night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not be-

cauſe we have not power, but to make ourſelves an example unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither ſhould he eat *."

For many centuries the nations of Europe had no other way of providing for their increaſing poor, when occaſional benefactions became inadequate to their wants, but by driving them out, like ſwarms, to ſeek new ſettlements. It was not then difficult for warlike tribes, iſſuing forth in countleſs numbers, with their flocks and with their herds, to make an impreſſion, when at any time they turned their arms againſt the peaceable inhabitants of more cultivated countries. But now that all have quitted the ſhepherd life and taken to agriculture; now that each nation, although more numerous than formerly, is hemmed in by nations equal to itſelf in numbers, wealth, and military ardour; it is become neceſſary to provide for their poor at home. This they have attempt-

* 2 Theſſ. iii. 8—10.

ed

ed by public hoſpitals and private benefactions. With regard to hoſpitals, they find that theſe only remove the evil for a time, and in the iſſue extend the bounds of extreme poverty and wretchedneſs. They at firſt pleaſed themſelves with the idea, that they had put an end to human miſery; but they ſoon found it returning back upon them, and the vacant places, which had been left by thoſe provided for in their public hoſpitals, filled up again by objects of diſtreſs. When at Lions they opened an hoſpital with forty beds for the reception of the poor, they could fill only half that number, but now eight hundred beds are not ſufficient; and when they built the hoſpital of Saltpetriere, near Paris, it had few inhabitants, but now they lodge twelve thouſand; and yet to their aſtoniſhment they find, that inſtead of having baniſhed diſtreſs and poverty, they have increaſed the number of the poor. The effect has filled them with amazement; but they do not ſeem to have as yet diſcovered, that they have been attempting to ſtop a rapid river in its pro-

greſs, and to puſh back the waters of the ocean.

In Holland their chief dependance is on voluntary contributions, and a rigid execution of the laws; and in Holland are to be ſeen more induſtry and fewer criminals, than are to be found in the beſt governed countries in Europe of the ſame extent.

SECT. XIV.

I AM now come to the moſt arduous part of my undertaking. Some remedy muſt be found for the growing evil, and thoſe which have been hitherto propoſed have been found inadequate. In laying down a plan, I ſhall begin with eſtabliſhing the general principles on which we muſt proceed.

It is evident then, that no ſyſtem can be good which does not, in the firſt place, encourage induſtry, œconomy, and ſubordination; and, in the ſecond place, regulate population by the demand for labour.

To

To promote induſtry and œconomy, it is neceſſary that the relief which is given to the poor ſhould be limited and precarious. "Langueſcet induſtria, intendetur ſocordia, ſi nullus ex ſe metus aut ſpes; et ſecuri omnes aliena ſubſidia expectabunt, ſibi ignavi, nobis graves." No man will be an œconomiſt of water, if he can go to the well or to the brook as often as he pleaſe; nor will he watch with ſolicitous attention to keep the balance even between his income and expenditure, if he is ſure to be relieved in the time of need. The labouring poor at preſent are greatly defective, both in reſpect to induſtry and œconomy. Conſidering the numbers to be maintained, they work too little, they ſpend too much, and what they ſpend is ſeldom laid out to the beſt advantage. When they return from threſhing or from plough, they might card, they might ſpin, or they might knit. We are told, that one thouſand pair of Shetland ſtockings are annually imported into Leith, of which the price is from five to ſeven pence a pair: yet labour at Lear-

wick, the ſmall capital of Shetland iſlands, is ten pence a day. Theſe ſtockings are made at leiſure hours. In theſe iſlands they have no dependance but upon their induſtry and frugality. They conſume neither tea, nor ſugar, nor ſpices, becauſe they cannot afford to purchaſe theſe uſeleſs articles; neither do they wear ſtockings or ſhoes, till by their diligence they have acquired ſuch affluence as to bear this expence. How different is theirs from the dreſs and diet of our common people, who have loſt all ideas of œconomy! If by their induſtry they could procure theſe articles of luxury, or if their linen, their cotton, and their ſilk, were ſpun, and wove, and knit in their own houſes, and at leiſure hours, their deſire to obtain theſe things would be advantageous to the ſtate: but ſurely, if in the colder regions of the North theſe are not eſſential to their exiſtence, or even to their happineſs, they ſhould be conſidered in the South only as the rewards of induſtry, and ſhould never, from the common fund, be given promiſcuouſly to all, as they will inevitably be, unleſs

unleſs that fund ſhall have ſome other limits beſides the wants and expectations of the poor. Unleſs the degree of preſſure be increaſed, the labouring poor will never acquire habits of diligent application, and of ſevere frugality. To increaſe this preſſure, the poor's tax muſt be gradually reduced in certain proportions annually, the ſum to be raiſed in each pariſh being fixed and certain, not boundleſs, and obliged to anſwer unlimited demands. This enormous tax might eaſily in the ſpace of nine years be reduced nine-tenths; and the remainder being reſerved as a permanent ſupply, the poor might ſafely be left to the free bounty of the rich, without the interpoſition of any other law. But if the whole ſyſtem of compulſive charity were aboliſhed, it would be ſtill better for the ſtate. I am not ſingular in this opinion. Baron Monteſquieu has given his opinion, "Que des ſecours paſſagers vaudroient mieux que des établiſſemens perpetuels *;" and our

* L. xxiii. C. 29.

own countryman, who had been long converſant with this buſineſs, has told us, "I am perſuaded that to provide for the poor, who are unable to work, might be ſafely left to voluntary charity, unenforced by any compulſive law *."

To aſſiſt the induſtrious poor, who have neither tools nor materials, but more eſpecially to train up the children of the diſſolute in uſeful labour, there might be in each pariſh one or more work-ſhops, where they might be certain of employment, and of daily pay for the work performed. In theſe ſhops they ſhould neither be lodged nor fed, being taught to depend each for himſelf on his own diligence and patient application to his buſineſs. The building, the tools, and the materials, would be all that required aſſiſtance from the public fund.

The grand reſource however ſhould be from the labouring poor themſelves, previous to their being incumbered with families. They have throughout the king-

* Fielding on Robbers.

dom

dom a number of friendly ſocieties eſtabliſhed, which have been productive of good effects, and in ſome places have reduced the rates. But theſe ſocieties have more than one defect. All their members contribute equally to the public fund, without reſpect to their ability, to the proportion of their gains, or to the number of their children. By this regulation ſome pay too little, others pay too much. The ſum, which they depoſit weekly, is inſignificant and trifling when compared with what it ought to be. But the greateſt misfortune is, that they are altogether left to their own option to join theſe ſocieties or not; in conſequence of which liberty, many of theſe aſſociations for mutual aſſiſtance are going to decay. If this be indeed a good expedient, it ſhould be puſhed as far as it will go: it ſhould be firmly eſtabliſhed, made univerſal, and ſubjected to wholeſome regulations. The unmarried man ſhould pay one quarter of his wages weekly, and the father of four young children not more than one thirtieth of his income, which is

nearly

nearly the ſum which all contribute to their preſent clubs. To drive them into theſe ſocieties, no man ſhould be intitled to relief from the parochial fund who did not belong to one of theſe. Thus would ſobriety, induſtry, and œconomy, take place of drunkenneſs, idleneſs, and prodigality, and due ſubordination would be again reſtored.

As long as it ſhould be found expedient to retain a given proportion of the preſent poor tax, the diſpoſal of this ſhould be wholly at the diſcretion of the miniſter, churchwardens, and overſeers, or the majority of them, ſubject only to the orders of a veſtry. By this proviſion the ſubordination of the poor would be more effectually ſecured, and the civil magiſtrate would be at liberty to bend his whole attention to the preſervation of the peace, and to the good government of the people.

This plan would be aided and aſſiſted much by laying a ſufficient tax upon the alehouſes to reduce their number, theſe being

being the principal nurſeries for drunkenneſs, idleneſs, and vice.

Should things be left thus to flow in their proper channels, the conſequence would be, that, as far as it is poſſible according to the preſent conſtitution of the world, our population would be no longer unnatural and forced, but would regulate itſelf by the demand for labour.

There remains one thing more for the legiſlature to do, which is to increaſe the quantity of food. This may be done with eaſe, by laying a tax upon all horſes uſed in huſbandry, gradually increaſing this tax till the farmers have returned to the uſe of oxen. This change would enable England not only to maintain her preſent population, but greatly to increaſe it. The land which now ſupports one horſe, in proper working order, would bear two oxen for draft and for the ſhambles, if not alſo one cow for the pail; or any two of theſe, with a man, his wife, and his three children. If we conſider the number of horſes at preſent uſed for huſbandry in this iſland, ſhould only half

that

that number give place to oxen, it would not be eaſy to calculate, or even to conceive, all the benefits and advantages which the public would derive from this vaſt increaſe of food. In many pariſhes where they have no manufactures, but the cultivation of the ſoil, the horſes conſume the produce of more land than the inhabitants themſelves require. Suppoſe a pariſh to conſiſt of four thouſand acres of arable and paſture land; let this be cultivated by one hundred and fifty horſes, and let it feed one thouſand ſouls: now if, for the preſent, we allow only two acres of oats and two of hay for each of the horſes, the amount will be ſix hundred productive acres, which will be more than ſufficient to feed the given number of inhabitants. But the fact is, that a horſe, to be fully fed, requires five ton of hay, and from thirteen to three-and-twenty quarters of oats, per annum, according to his work. Some farmers allow the former, and the latter is given by the great carriers on the public roads, which would bring the computation to about eight acres

acres each for horſes uſed in huſbandry; but then few farmers ſuffer their horſes to be highly fed. If we allow three acres of paſture for each ox or cow, and conſider, that in calculating the quantity of land ſufficient to maintain a team of horſes, the needful fallows muſt be carried to account, we ſhall not be at a loſs for food, when we have ſubſtituted two oxen, and one family of five perſons, in the place of every horſe.

It muſt be confeſſed, that the tax on horſes would be apparently a tax on huſbandry, but in reality it would only be a tax on pride and prejudice. Neither would it be a tax for the purpoſe of revenue, which would certainly be moſt impolitic; but it would be a tax for the regulation of trade, beneficial to the public, and highly advantageous to the farmer. In China they uſe few cattle in the cultivation of the ſoil, and therefore they are able to ſupport a more abundant population. By reverting to the antient practice of ploughing with oxen inſtead of horſes, we ſhould enjoy the ſame advantage;

tage; and till the population of our country had found its utmoſt limits, we ſhould rejoice in affluence.

With the ſame intentions, the legiſlature ſhould facilitate the laying common fields in ſeveralty, leaving the incloſure of theſe lands to every man's diſcretion. Wherever theſe allotments have been carried into execution, the value of land has been nearly doubled. Yet, independent of the exertion, the time, and the fatigue, requiſite to procure a private act of parliament for this purpoſe, the expence of the act itſelf, and of the conſequent incloſure, is more than many are willing to incur. That the improvers of land ſhould be ſubject to this expence is not juſt, and that men ſhould be obliged to incloſe theſe lands is neither juſt nor wiſe; becauſe hedge-rows conſume much land, ſtint the growth of corn, cauſe it to lodge, prevent its drying, and harbour birds. If men are left at liberty, without reſtraint, when they find it for their intereſt to incloſe, they will incloſe.

Should

Should the Houſe of Commons, agreeable to the reſolutions of 1775, enter ſeriouſly into this buſineſs, and adopt ſuch regulations as may effectually relieve the public from the grievous and ſtill increaſing burthen, which for more than half a century has been the ſubject of ſerious inveſtigation and of loud complaints; it will be neceſſary for magiſtrates to pay more than common attention to the police, till induſtry and ſubordination ſhall be once more reſtored. The reins have been held with a looſe hand, at a time when the idleneſs and extravagance, the drunkenneſs and diſſipation, with the conſequent crimes and vices of the lower claſſes of the people, called for the moſt ſtrenuous exertions of the magiſtrate, and the moſt ſtrict execution of the laws.

If the labouring poor, in health, previous to marriage, and whilſt their families are ſmall, are compelled to raiſe a fund for their own ſupport, in caſe of ſickneſs or old age; there can be no doubt, that when at any time, from peculiar circumſtances, this fund ſhall prove inadequate, the

the moſt liberal contributions will be made to relieve any occaſional diſtreſs. No one can doubt of this, who has witneſſed the generous efforts which were lately made to aſſiſt the woollen manufacturers in Glouceſterſhire during the ſtagnation of their trade. Money was collected for them from all the adjacent counties, and in the metropolis, to feed and to employ them. At Minchin Hampton in particular, when the poor's tax was ſeven ſhillings in the pound on the rack rents, and their poor were more than commonly diſtreſſed, two thouſand two hundred perſons were cloathed, fed, and ſet to work, by voluntary benefactions. It ſhould be added, for the credit of theſe poor people, that they worked from ſix in the morning till eight at night. Had the manufacture fallen to riſe no more, the manufacturers muſt in reaſon have retired, or muſt have turned their hands to ſomething elſe; becauſe no fund, no tax, no charitable contributions, can ſupport ſuch a multitude of people when their trade is gone. In caſes of

ſudden

ſudden emergency aſſiſtance will be loudly called for, and the affluent will not be tardy in ſending a ſupply. The Engliſh have never yet been charged with want of charity. There need not many arguments to excite their pity and compaſſion: the only difficulty is to reſtrain the impetuoſity of their benevolence, and to direct their bounty towards the moſt worthy objects.

Beſides theſe ſudden emergencies, affecting whole diſtricts where extenſive manufactures are eſtabliſhed, individuals muſt be ever ſubject to occaſional diſtreſs, from various accidents and from unexpected loſſes, which, without the kind aſſiſtance of a friend, they are not able to ſupport. In ſuch circumſtances, where can the ſufferer look for help? Not to the overſeers of the poor; for their authority does not extend beyond food and raiment. To make good his loſſes, and to ſupport him in his ſtation, induſtry in diſtreſs can find no ſufficient refuge but in the generous aid of his more affluent and charitable neighbours. This refuge

will never fail him; nor will they ever ſuffer him to want, if they are able to relieve him, and if he has proved himſelf worthy of compaſſion.

To relieve the poor by voluntary donations is not only moſt wiſe, politic, and juſt; is not only moſt agreeable both to reaſon and to revelation; but it is moſt effectual in preventing miſery, and moſt excellent in itſelf, as cheriſhing, inſtead of rancour, malice, and contention, the oppoſite and moſt amiable affections of the human breaſt, pity, compaſſion, and benevolence in the rich, love, reverence, and gratitude in the poor. Nothing in nature can be more diſguſting than a pariſh pay-table, attendant upon which, in the ſame objects of miſery, are too often found combined, ſnuff, gin, rags, vermin, inſolence, and abuſive language; nor in nature can any thing be more beautiful than the mild complacency of benevolence, haſtening to the humble cottage to relieve the wants of induſtry and virtue, to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, and to ſooth the ſorrows of the widow

with her tender orphans; nothing can be more pleaſing, unleſs it be their ſparkling eyes, their burſting tears, and their uplifted hands, the artleſs expreſſions of unfeigned gratitude for unexpected favours. Such ſcenes will frequently occur whenever men ſhall have power to diſpoſe of their own property. When the poor are obliged to cultivate the friendſhip of the rich, the rich will never want inclination to relieve the diſtreſſes of the poor.

FINIS.